

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	INL-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EUR-00	VC1-00
	FDRE-01	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	CAC-00	MOFM-00
	MOF-00	VCIE-00	NSAE-00	NIMA-00	GIWI-00	SGAC-00	FMPC-00
	SP-00	NCTC-00	SCRS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	SAS-00
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 FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0606
 INFO IGAD COLLECTIVE
 AMEMBASSY ROME
 HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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 SECDEF WASHDC
 CIA WASHDC
 DIA WASHDC
 JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
 CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
 COMUSNAVCENT

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000407

DEPT FOR AF/E AND AF/RSA; NAIROBI FOR GEORGIANNA PLATT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2019

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: ISAIAS ADMITS FAMINE PRESENT IN ERITREA; PROMISES
 UNICEF ACCESS

Classified By: CDA Melinda Tabler-Stone for reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a surprising departure from his public pronouncements on the non-existence of hunger in Eritrea, President Isaias admitted to visiting UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Hilde Johnson that there is famine in the country and UNICEF's help is needed. Johnson briefed Western diplomats on her November 17-18 visit to Eritrea and her lengthy meeting with Isaias. She said Isaias promised UNICEF total access to the country for the purposes of conducting a nutrition survey and providing blanket supplementary feeding. End summary.

¶2. (C) Johnson, a former minister of development from Norway, briefed Western diplomats November 18 at the close of her two-day visit. She and UNICEF staff met with President Isaias for an hour and a half, followed by a lengthy private meeting with the president. She reported she obtained Isaias's emphatic agreement to provide UNICEF with access to the entire country for the purpose of conducting a nutritional survey and supplementary feeding for children. (UNICEF has been greatly restricted in its travel outside Asmara for over a year, suffers from the same diesel restriction as does the rest of the UN mission, and was forced by the GSE to relocate its office to less desirable premises). She also pushed Isaias for greater access to reports and statistics, which he reportedly granted. He even agreed to closer cooperation with the World Food Program. Johnson noted Yemane Ghebreab had had a fruitful discussion with WFP in Rome last month.

¶3. (C) Johnson characterized Isaias as highly focused and cogent during the meeting. He admitted that Eritrea's efforts so far to combat hunger and promote child health had not been completely successful, and that he welcomed UNICEF's help. He stated there is famine in Eritrea. He agreed the nutritional survey was necessary to see what had worked in combatting malnutrition. He even expressed a desire for regional cooperation in food security, saying he did not want to see a "single hungry Ethiopian child." Johnson also reported that GSE officials made no effort to hide cases of severe malnutrition at a referral hospital in Massawa and were grinning widely to hear their president agree to cooperate with UNICEF.

¶4. (C) Comment. Johnson emphasized repeatedly her long personal association with Isaias and may have heard what she wanted to hear. But possibly Isaias is truly worried about

conditions in the country and his flagging popularlity. His sincerity and willingness to accept UNICEF help will be proven only if diesel fuel and travel permits are forthcoming.

Tabler-Stone